

# Ministry of Grace Church

## Exodus 20 – Speaker Notes

Today we are going to look at Exodus chapter 20. This chapter recounts the giving of the 10 Commandments to the children of Israel. Now, there may be a number of you saying to yourself that this is a waste of time because, as Christians we are no longer under the law. So, let me say unequivocally, “You are absolutely correct, the 10 Commandments do not apply to Christians today!” In fact, they were never applicable to Christians! But - it’s not a waste of time to learn about them. We can learn a lot about what God considers “righteous” by looking at them.

Who were the 10 Commandments given to? The Jews. What was the purpose? To save everyone who perfectly keeps them? Well, yes and no. Anyone who perfectly keeps the 10 Commandments for their entire life is declared righteous in God’s eyes. That is, they are saved. But there’s only one person who is, or ever was, capable of perfectly keeping the 10 Commandments. In [1 John 2:1](#), the Apostle John calls Him, “... [Jesus Christ, the Righteous.](#)”

The 10 Commandments, given at Mt. Sinai, are part of the Mosaic Law which was perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. He didn’t eliminate the Law; He met all the requirements of the Law. When Jesus died without having broken a single portion of the Law, He proved that He is righteous. As part of that righteousness, He was not condemned to death like the remainder of Adam’s descendants are.

And, as Christians, through our faith in the death of Christ and His resurrection, we have been declared righteous as Paul told the Philippians:

[And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: \(Philippians 3:9\)](#)

And, because we have been declared righteous, the law has been ended for us:

[For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. \(Romans 10:4\)](#)

Therefore, the 10 Commandments in the Mosaic Law do not apply to Christians! Our righteousness is not attained by being obedient to the Law, it is attained by faith, as Paul told the church in Galatia:

[yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... \(Galatians 2:16\)](#)

So, why do we concern ourselves with the Ten Commandments if they don’t apply to us? Even though we are no longer under the Law, nine of the ten commandments were reinstated by Jesus Christ and His apostles. The only commandment that hasn’t been reinstated in the New Testament is the fourth one, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

But even trying to keep the remaining 9 commandments is tough. In fact, it’s impossible! So Jesus made it even easier. There are only two commandments that apply to Christians today. In fact, these apply to everyone throughout time. Here’s what Jesus said when asked about the greatest commandment in the Law:

[... “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” \(Matthew 22:37-40\)](#)

What Jesus was saying, in effect, is that anyone who loves God with all their heart, soul, and mind, -and- loves their neighbor as themselves, is righteous in God’s eyes. So - other than Jesus, how many people have ever, or will ever, perfectly keep these two commandments? None!

So, if it's impossible to do, why do we even concern ourselves with this part of Scripture? The answer is that when we do our very best to keep the Commandments, it pleases God, but only when done in faith. No matter how hard you try, you can't please God unless you believe the message He has given to all mankind. That's called faith, and according to the book of Hebrews:

... without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Finally, because a Christian is by definition a person of "faith," we should spend our entire life here on this earth trying to reflect the righteousness that is ours by obeying the 9 commandments, or the two commandments.

Now, let's take a few minutes to look at the Ten Commandments that *Yahweh* gave directly to the children of Israel. Remember, the Israelites had been gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai while *Yahweh* appeared on the top of the mountain in the form of a cloud. As He talked to the Israelites, they were able to hear Him. Here's the message He gave them.

### **Exodus 20:1, 2**

**And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."**

*Yahweh* begins his message to Moses and the Israelites by proclaiming three things about Himself.

1. He is *Yahweh*, the self-existing one.
2. He is the God (*Elohim*) of the Israelites.
3. In bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, He is the one who has done everything for the Israelites, they have done nothing except to believe Him and follow Him.

Throughout the giving of the Law and all its details God reminded the Israelites of these three things, He is *Yahweh*, He is the *Elohim* of Israel, and It is He who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. These three things represent a unique relationship between the children of Israel and *Yahweh*

One may ask, "Why did God not proclaim Himself as 'The creator of heaven and earth'?" The answer is that these Ten Commandments were not given to mankind in general. They were given to the children of Israel as God's covenant people. Paul expends considerable effort in the earlier chapters of the book of Romans showing us that Christians are not under the bondage of the Law. However, as we will see in this study, all but one of these commandments are reiterated in the New Testament. The only one not given to the church is the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, regarding the Sabbath. Incidentally, the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday.

### **Exodus 20:3 - 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment**

**You shall have no other gods before me.**

The first, and foremost, of all the commandments is that the Israelites were not to have any other gods. They were to worship, revere, and serve only *Yahweh*.

What does he mean by "before me" – This can most literally be interpreted as "in my presence." Since there is nowhere that God is not present, it literally means that there is not to be anyone or anything that the Israelites worship, revere, and serve as a deity except *Yahweh*.

**New Testament Version** - This commandment is restated in the New Testament: book of First Timothy.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Timothy 2:5)

## **Exodus 20:4-6 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment**

**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

This commandment is the prohibition of image worship. Notice that it starts off with a prohibition of a carved image, then prohibition of any likeness of any creature, then prohibition of the worship of any likeness. This refers to any kind of image, either of wood, stone, or metal, on which the axe, the chisel, or the engraving tool has been used. It even includes pictures.

The Egyptians had many gods who were worshipped in animal forms. The Israelites had grown-up in a world where it was commonplace and even expected that everyone would worship the images of these gods.

**!!!** If you were to carefully read the Roman Catholic version of the Bible, you would discover that this commandment is missing! As a result, there is no prohibition from worshipping idols by their way of thinking. Here's what Adam Clarke, in his *Commentary on the Bible*, says of the Roman Catholic action of removing this commandment from the ten:

To countenance its image worship, the Roman Catholic Church has left the whole of this second commandment out of the decalogue, and thus lost one whole commandment out of the ten; but to keep up the number they have divided the tenth into two. This is totally contrary to the faith of God's elect and to the acknowledgment of that truth which is according to godliness. The verse (regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment) is found in every Manuscript of the Hebrew Pentateuch that has ever yet been discovered.

God knows the propensity of man to worship things. Hence, He extends His prohibition of creating idols by declaring that they are not to be worshiped, bowed down to, or served.

Though we are taught throughout the New Testament that envy and jealousy are wrong, nonetheless God is a jealous God. This word is always used to describe God's attitude toward the worship of false gods, which arouses His jealousy and anger in judgment against the idol worshipers.

What does He mean by, “**visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children.**” The implication here seems to be that the sins of the father will have consequences for their children for several generations. It does not mean that the children are guilty of their father's sins, but that descendants inherit the consequences of their fathers' sins, in the form of disease, poverty, and captivity, along with all the influences of bad examples and evil communications.

Notice, however, that the expression “**of those who hate me**” limits the effect of the previous expression. In other words, not all children will inherit the consequences of their fathers' sins. It specifically focuses on those who refuse to acknowledge God as the supreme ruler of the universe. This key phrase is often omitted when this passage is being taught.

It might appear that God's love is limited because He said: “**showing steadfast love to thousands**” The reference here is not to thousands of people but thousands of generations. In other words, God's steadfast love (translated “mercy” in some translations) is available to all mankind of all time no matter what their ancestors have done. Compare this with what is said in Deuteronomy:

**Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, (Deuteronomy 7:9)**

**New Testament Version** - This commandment is reiterated by the Apostle John in the New Testament:

**Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)**

### **Exodus 20:7 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment**

**You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.**

This refers to the inappropriate use of God's name for any vain purpose. This includes the use of God's name in imprecatory or otherwise vulgar and idle language, as well as proclaiming an oath (such as "I swear to God it's the truth") as an empty form.

**New Testament Version** - This commandment is reiterated by the Apostle James in the New Testament:

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

(James 5:12)

### **Exodus 20:8–11 - 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

This is the only commandment in which the Israelites were told to "remember." This could be a reference to the lesson they had recently learned about not gathering manna on the Sabbath. Or, more likely, it is a calling to mind of the fact that God created the physical universe and all that is on the earth in six days, then rested on the seventh.

**New Testament Rescinding of this commandment** - There are two verses in the New Testament which taken together effectively rescind, or negate, the effect of this command:

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Romans 14:5)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. (Colossians 2:16)

### **Exodus 20:12 - 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.**

This commandment is one which demands submission to the authority of parents. Notice that this is the only commandment that carries a promise with it. Though this commandment specifically identifies submission to parents, the implication is that we are to submit ourselves to all who have been placed in positions of authority over us. The message of this commandment is clear: "If you will submit to authorities, things will go well for you and you will live long." Also notice that this commandment is given specifically to the children of Israel (in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.)

**New Testament Version** - The Apostle Paul specifically identifies this commandment and its promise:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

(Ephesians 6:1-3)

### **Exodus 20:13 - 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**You shall not murder.**

This commandment is specifically directed at the killing of another person unjustly. Obviously, it does not include the killing of animals, for the Israelites were commanded to kill animals as sacrifices and they killed animals for food (though they were forbidden from consuming the blood of the animals). The act of killing was also permitted in judicial situations and, in fact, the Israelites were commanded to stone to death those who violated certain of the commandments and ordinances.

**New Testament Version** - Our Lord specifically identified murder as wrong. He even equated anger with murder:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment ... (Matthew 5:21-22a)

### **Exodus 20:14 - 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**You shall not commit adultery.**

This commandment forbids certain sexual acts. The Hebrew word translated “adultery” specifically refers to a married person engaging in sex with a married person other than his or her spouse.” This is different from the Hebrew word translated “fornication” which means engaging in sex with anyone to whom you are not married. Although the difference is a subtle one, this commandment specifically forbids adultery. This is not to say that fornication is permissible, for adultery and fornication are both identified as works of the flesh by Paul:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, (Galatians 5:19) [KJV]

And Paul said that fornication not only should not be committed by a Christian, but the mere mention of it pertaining to a Christian is abhorrent:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; (Ephesians 5:3) [KJV]

**New Testament Version** – Not only did our Lord identify adultery as wrong, He even said that looking at a woman with lustful thoughts is the same as adultery:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

And Paul tells us that adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1Corinthians 6:9-10)

### **Exodus 20:15 - 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**You shall not steal.**

This commandment forbids the taking of property belonging to someone without the other person’s permission. This applies equally to the taking of property by force, by stealth, or by fraud. Just because something is not guarded or protected does not mean that it is public property. This commandment is closely related to the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment.

**New Testament Version** - The Apostle Paul tells us that stealing is wrong and should not be attributed to any Christian:

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28)

### **Exodus 20:16 - 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

This commandment specifically forbids making false or untrue statements about another person. It does not specifically forbid all lying. Does that mean it's OK to lie as long as it's not about another person? Remember how we started out this lesson, with the words of Jesus:

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:39)

If we live according to this principle, we will do nothing which would cause any kind of harm to another person. If we actively practice this principle, we won't have to worry about lying.

**New Testament Version** - Paul identifies lying as a work of the flesh (our old man, or sin nature) and specifically forbids it among Christians:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Colossians 3:9-10)

### **Exodus 20:17 - 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

**“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”**

Whereas the sixth through ninth commandments addressed respecting the person and possession of others, this commandment specifically addresses our **thoughts** about another person's possessions.

Our thoughts control our actions. When confronted with the Pharisees' attention to the minutest detail of their oral traditions, Jesus pointed out that the observance of these rites and rituals is not important. Instead, He taught, it is the thoughts and intents of the heart that potentially defile us.

Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. (Matthew 15:17-20a)

Also, notice that the Apostle James equates the desire for “stuff” to friendship with the world system. He then tells us that if we are a friend with the world system, we are the enemy of God.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:1-4)

**New Testament Version** - In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul equated covetousness with fornication and all kinds of uncleanness:

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. (Ephesians 5:3)

## **Exodus 20:18, 19**

**Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”**

When the Israelites witnessed God proclaiming the Ten Commandments, they were filled with fear. This passage in Exodus does not specifically say that they heard the voice of God. It says they witnessed thundering, lightning flashes, and the sound of the trumpet. However, the parallel passage in Deuteronomy ([Deuteronomy 5:22-26](#)) makes it clear that the Israelites heard the voice of God:

## **Exodus 20:20**

**Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”**

Moses states clearly the purpose of the Ten Commandments along with the rest of the Law. They were provided as a test, one which all will fail because, as the Apostle Paul said to the Christians in Rome, in quoting Psalms 14:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. ([Psalms 14:2-3](#))

This verse also teaches that there are two kinds of fear. Both occurrences of the word “fear” here are derived from the same root word. However, Moses tells the Israelites not to fear. Then, in the same breath, he says that the purpose of the Law is a test in order that we might fear God. This fear of God, he says, is what will keep us from our natural tendency to sin.

## **Exodus 20:21-26**

**The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. And the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it. And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.’**

Beginning in verse twenty-one and continuing through to the end of chapter 33 are a series of specific laws which were written by Moses in a book later called “The Book of the Covenant.”

## **So What?**

### **Law Keepers**

The children of Israel were told that keeping the law would produce life. (See [Leviticus 18:1-5](#)) Unfortunately, as we see in [Psalms 14:1-3](#) and in [Romans 3:10-12](#), none of us is capable of keeping the law. And as the Apostle James tells us, even if we perfectly keep nearly all the law and slip-up in a single point, we are guilty of breaking all the law:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ([James 2:10](#))

Only one person ever kept the whole Law and obeyed all of God’s ordinances. That person is Jesus Christ. And, because He completely kept the law, He has eternal life. He did not have to pay for His sins because He didn’t have any. As a result, He was able to offer His blood as payment for our sins.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul instructed them that righteousness does not come from obeying the Law:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.  
(Romans 3:19-20)

Does this mean that we can live however we want, knowing that God will forgive us? Absolutely not! But the motivation for our obedience to God should not be to gain righteousness or even gain His favor. Our obedience should be motivated by love. We should keep His commandments because we love Him:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

If we know Jesus Christ as Savior, that is if we have a close personal knowledge of Him, we will keep His commandments. On the other hand, not even trying to keep them proves that we don't know Him:

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,  
(1 John 2:3-4)

And, if we love Him, we will demonstrate it by obeying Him and we are promised that God the Father loves us and will come and live with us:

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23)

### **Fear vs. fear**

In verse twenty we noted that Moses told the children of Israel not to fear. But the reason for God appearing as He did on Mt. Sinai was so that they would fear Him. So, are we to fear God or not? The expressions “fear God,” “fear of God,” “fear the Lord,” or “fear of the Lord” are found nearly one hundred times in the Bible. And, the command “do not fear” is found more than fifty times in the Word. In Psalms 111:10 and in Proverbs 9:10 we are told,

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; ...

This type of fear is not that which produces a running from God and cowering in His presence. Instead, it is a reverence for who and what He is that produces confidence and voluntary obedience through submission to His will and humbling ourselves in His presence.

Solomon, at the end of his search for the meaning of life also tells us that the fear of God and keeping His commandments are the sum total of why we are here on the earth:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

There are really only two commandments that we are to keep. Remember what Jesus said about the commandments?

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Does this characterize your relationship with God and with other people?

Let's pray.